

NATIONAL CATHOLIC EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATION CONVENTION & EXPO 2019
Chicago, Illinois McCormick Place West April 23-25, 2019

The Exhibit Hall was enormous with over 300 exhibitors present. Our table looked inviting and many stopped by to chat and learn about our NCCW. Andrea and Rose manned the table while Maribeth attended the meetings.

The first day, Tuesday, April 23, began with Mass in the huge conference hall ballroom. A choir of students energetically sang as Cardinal Blase Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago, presided over the opening Mass. He was accompanied by four bishops and numerous priests. Following Mass, children from a local Catholic school performed a dragon and lotus flower dance. Watching them precisely and gracefully perform, one was again filled with hope for our future Catholic Church, for these children and the choir were just wonderful. It was very inspiring.

Nine thousand attendees from throughout the nation gathered for this convention so not only was it a golden opportunity to showcase our NCCW to teachers, principals, and superintendents of Catholic schools from across the USA, the program was jam packed with presentations. Topics of sessions included: Academic Content, Adult Faith Formation, Assessment, Campus Ministry, Classroom Management, Collaborative Partnerships, Digital Discipleship, Diversity, Early Childhood Education, Enrollment, Exceptional Learners, Fiscal Responsibility, Governance, Leadership, Marketing, National and State Perspectives, Student Faith Formation, and Student Service Programs. Each day required choices to be made to attend one of so many offerings per session. What follows is a summary of the sessions Maribeth was able to attend.

The first session was a broad overview of the state of Catholic education in the United States. The panel that presented consisted of the Most Reverend Gerald Kicanas, Chair of the NCEA Board, Thomas Burnford, President and CEO of the NCEA, Sister Dale McDonald, Director of Public Policy and Educational Research for the NCEA, a first year teacher from a Catholic High School and a graduating senior from a Catholic High School. Bishop Kicanas and Thomas Burnford spoke of the overall picture of Catholic education, the young teacher spoke movingly about the lack of something she felt after two years of college and no Catholic education that was remedied by learning of Catholic Social Teaching, In contrast, the student spoke movingly about what she has valued in her Catholic school background. How it has been holistic training that will remain throughout her life. Sister presented an overview of a statistical report that is published annually by the NCEA based on census returns from all the Catholic schools in the country.

She emphasized that Catholic school students enjoy success in later life at a much higher percentage than private or public school students. While there are many challenges, primarily rising tuition costs, making a Catholic school education more difficult for middle class parents especially as they are not wealthy and they are not in a class that receives benefits due to a lack of wealth. To help with this, dioceses around the country are implementing programs of fundraising for tuition assistance as well as marketing the benefits of academic excellence and faith formation advantages of a Catholic education. Optimism about school choice is growing as opinion polls demonstrate rising support for publicly financed programs. Presently, 29 states and the District of Columbia have legislation that provides some form of financial assistance.

In 2018, 2 million children were educated in 6,289 Catholic schools. Thirty percent of Catholic schools have waiting lists. Catholic schools saved local and state governments over 21 billion dollars/year.

Students in Catholic schools last year out-performed students from private and public schools in every measure taken (e.g., PSAT, SAT, etc.). Forty-four of the forty-nine Federal Blue Ribbon Schools last year were Catholic schools. The graduation rate from Catholic schools in 2018 was 99.2% while public schools awarded diplomas to 84.1%. A recent Fordham Study noted that statistically, Catholic school children are less likely to act out badly despite population demographics than their counterparts in public schools. Students from disadvantaged homes succeed better in Catholic schools than public schools. Students who attend Catholic schools are more likely to retain their Catholic identity, pray more, and go to church more as adults than those who attended public schools. The percentage of Catholic school graduates who attended a 4-year college is 86.5% as opposed to 46% for public school students. An additional 10% of Catholic school students went on to a 2-year college or joined the military.

Enrollment is down in some areas of the country. Sixteen new schools were built last year but 110 closed. While the Hispanic and Latino populations in the Catholic Church in the US are growing, only 17.4% of the Catholic school population was Hispanic/Latino, not reflecting the growth in this community. Must figure out a way to emphasize to the Hispanic community the value of a Catholic school education.

Decrease in enrollment is due to: significant demographic shifts, change in church attendance, the decrease in religious staff and increase in salaried staff with higher wages and health plans, and parental lifestyle choices (Disney World vacation vs. Catholic school tuition).

Parental Choice for tuition assistance is growing.

The outlook for Catholic schools is hopeful but we must be vigilant in marketing the academic and faith formation advantages of Catholic school education and must hire teachers that are familiar with and live the Catholic faith or it is useless to tout any Catholic school identity.

The next session attended was Helping Kids and Teens Embrace the Fullness of Catholic Social Teaching. The seven key themes of Catholic Social Teaching were explored by a man who is a child psychologist and a catechist with action steps teachers can use for each developmental stage. The goal is to teach that Catholic Social Teaching goes beyond politics and secular ideologies and to work beyond a polarized society to form children and teens to live and proclaim the beauty of Catholic teaching. They must learn to care for all creation and to defend the life, rights, and dignity of all human persons. Not an easy task in today's divided society but it is absolutely essential to place these children on the track of living lives in concert with Catholic doctrines, social teaching, and values if we are ever to progress to become the universal brotherhood that Christ proclaimed in His Gospel and that He expects of us. It is essential that those teaching Catholic Social Teaching be seen to be living it themselves. Children and teens, whether they may seem to or not, value what their teachers say and do and mimic it. Live Catholic values accordingly.

After these sessions, attendees reconvened in the Ballroom for a lovely opening ceremony and a General Session. Ann Garrido spoke on Embracing Grace in the 21st Century Church. She spoke of how teaching today in Catholic schools can be challenging as we see the students/parents change in their demeanor and demands. The pay is not commensurate with public school yet every day, there are unexpected moments of grace that sustain teachers. She related the story of a girl named Grace who

she met as a catechist when Grace was 2. As Grace grew, she provided wise insight and probing questions. When Grace went away to college, they lost touch and Ann was afraid of getting in touch as she feared that Grace might have become a “none” statistic. Finally, they Skyped and we had the benefit of seeing the tape of that conversation. Grace was now a senior in college and resolved to come home after graduation and wanted to volunteer in the same catechist group that taught her as she grew up. She spoke beautifully of how grateful she is to have had the benefit of finding a deep faith at a young age that has sustained her. So, there are many “graces” found every day in teaching in a Catholic school. Teaching in a Catholic school is a ministry and being centered in our Catholic faith and values provides hope. Often, teachers learn as much if not more from their students than they teach the student as the student provides a different perspective through their questions the teacher may not have considered. Teaching in a Catholic school is a gift. Take time to nourish your own faith life and rejoice in the moments of grace given you through your ministry. You are shaping the future of our society and of our church.

The day closed with a “pep rally” featuring a full marching band and cheers about loving Catholic education!

August 24, 2019

The day began with Mass with Bishop Gerald Kicanas as principal celebrant. Beautiful music was supplied by a local high school choir that was extraordinary. Bishop Kicanas used the reading of Paul having the crippled man rise and walk as an example of how Jesus passed on the mission to Paul who through apostolic succession has passed the faith to us. He also used an example of observing an old fiddler in Appalachia teaching a young fiddler. The old man had learned from a French soldier who had in turn learned from an older man. When asked if he was teaching for money the old man said no, it was to pass on the music. In the same way Catholic school teachers, and all of us, are charged with passing on the faith.

Andrea and Rose again manned our booth which saw a lot of traffic with many expressing interest in our NCCW. It is excellent to be here as so many women mentioned that they had never heard of Council. This was a great opportunity for us and wonderful exposure.

The first session attended was about leadership in an age of missionary discipleship and creating a culture of growth and continuous improvement. This session incorporated teachings on leadership from several Church documents, especially some of the recent Apostolic Exhortations. The goal was to let these documents inform the choices we make as leaders. We began with a look at Revelation (not the book in the Bible) but how revelation is given to us which is by creation, tradition, Scripture, and experience. But leadership is about moving from inputs of revelation to outputs. How do you lead? You need to share personal experiences. There is no blueprint for learning leadership. No one is born to do it. You must examine yourself and understand your weaknesses, vulnerabilities, and insecurities. We need to stop seeking perfection in schools and in life. When we fall short, people say that is not Catholic or how a leader acts. People are always in the process of becoming. Be patient with yourself and constantly seek to improve. Recommended book: *A Hidden Holiness*. The speaker then turned to the Parable of the Sower and said that the job of a leader is to prepare others for their work. We then looked at some selected quotes from *Evangelii Gaudium*, specifically paragraphs 15, 20, 27, 37, 49, and 54. The Church grows by attraction. The Missionary Option means transforming everything for the sake of evangelization. Mercy is the greatest virtue, and we face a globalization of indifference. What do you value more, truth or mercy? Is it better to be correct or to be merciful? Reality is you need a mix of both as a leader, but mercy is most important. Next, we looked at *Gaudete et Exsultate* number 31 and then at various Church documents. Vatican II gave us a new look at the Mission Statement of the

Church; provided liturgical reforms and a move to the vernacular to be more accessible, and the Bible became more available and studied by more people. The Church provided less of a fortress mentality and more of a community. *To Teach as Jesus Did*, released in 1972, was a message of fellowship and service (14). The Catholic community should not just be concerned with itself (29). A follow-up document was called *Teach Them* with the goals of doctrine, community, and service. Administrators must foster community. Catholic schools are expensive and often pastors feel they are too expensive. Must affirm the commitment to Catholic schools. A 1977 document, *The Catholic School: Salvific Mission of the Church* stated that the primary mission of the Church is to save souls, provide formation of the whole person. This is the privileged role of Catholic schools and organizations. Schools must be communities with values communicated as relationships. The same is true of our NCCW. Beatitudes should define the values of the Catholic school (same for our NCCW). Best to stop using the phrase Gospel values as most Catholics sadly are not familiar with what Gospel values are (when parents were given a list of phrases and asked to circle Gospel values, they thought an eye for an eye was a Gospel value). Instead, say the Beatitudes define the values. The document finally stated that the value of Catholic schools is not dependent upon their methodology or technology but truly on the quality of the teachers. Question: What do you do when choosing teachers? Take the best qualified in their subject or take good but less qualified teachers who know Catholic values and live them. Response: The latter should be chosen unless the highly qualified teacher can and is willing to learn Catholic teachings and incorporate them into the classroom. Experience depends on knowing yourself, learning from trusted others, values, accountability, transparency, and honesty. How much do we share and with whom? Find people to trust that you can share with. Book recommendation: Henri Nouwen's *Life of the Beloved*. Best book on leadership. Breaks into a 4-part movement: Taken, Blessed, Broken, and Given. Taken = you were chosen for where you are. You were given gifts from God for a reason. 2. You have been blessed with the gifts you were given and the opportunity to use them, 3. You've been broken/disappointed in life. Everyone has these times. 4. Continue to give and serve. In another book, Lowney (75) says that 71% of Catholics who left the Church said they left because their spiritual needs were not being met. They are leaving Church and Catholic schools because their sense of community is not being met. Sergioanni's book, *Moral Leadership*, says we need to create followers, not subordinates. Everyone should agree on normative rationality. A common culture requires moral authority. The Haas song, *You Are Mine*, speaks to not being afraid -God has blessed you so use those gifts.

The next session was given the title: Do You Know Who I Am? Reflecting Catholic Identity Since this entire Convention was for Catholic school teachers and administrators, like other sessions, this one concentrated on Catholic school identity. While the other sessions translated easily to our NCCW, this one was rather specific to Catholic schools but of great interest and can be extrapolated to pertain to our NCCW. The goal was to get participants to reflect deeply on the nature of Catholic identity as we are surrounded by a very secular society. Catholic schools now may include non-Catholic students in parts of the country. We need to determine what are the essential attributes of a Catholic school that cannot be surrendered for enrollment numbers. First and foremost is that the school must have a distinctly Catholic mission in the world. How can the school foster the mission of the Church in a very secular world? How can they be welcoming to all yet maintain a strong Catholic identity? Well, it is a mistake to think that by advertising a school as Christian that they can maintain a Catholic identity. Catholic schools are different from Christian schools which are now largely seen as Evangelical or Fundamental. It is a mistake to think that hiring faculty that may be well qualified in their subject but are not versed in Catholic tradition and values could translate to furthering the mission of the Church or to making a Catholic school Catholic. Attendance at Mass for schoolchildren should be as frequent as possible with reinforcement of what the children are seeing, praying, and doing given in the classroom.

Catholic schools should retain visuals of Catholic identity: crucifixes in each classroom, statues, etc. Religion class should not be a watered-down version of Catholic teachings to make it more broadly Christian. Catholic Social Teachings presented appropriately at each grade/developmental level must be incorporated into more than religion class. Service projects should not be seen as fun time away from the classroom or as hours that need to be fulfilled but must be presented as something Catholics want to do and should continue to do throughout their lives joyfully for it is in helping others that we receive. It is never too young to start teaching prayers and tenets of the faith. In order to remain a Catholic school, attributes that make the school Catholic must not be surrendered to grow enrollment. The purpose of a Catholic school is to provide a holistic formation so that the student learns and lives a Catholic identity throughout the rest of their lives. This is as important, perhaps more so, than academic excellence. Both are needed but if a school is a Catholic school, it should be unapologetically so. Parishioners, benefactors, and alumni expect no less. Financial assistance for tuition should be advocated for by schools wherever states have not granted parental choice.

The next session concerned the dynamics of disaffiliation in young Catholics. This would complement our newest resource, *Calling All Catholics: Passing Our Faith to the Next Generation*. St. Mary's Press related their extensive research on young Catholics who have left the Church. The study examines young people between 15-25 years old who once were Catholic but who do not identify as Catholic now.

They reviewed the factors that reinforce the dynamics that lead to disaffiliation and the implications for the Church and for Catholic schools. Their study is called *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics*. Statistics were collected making this a quantitative study and stories were recorded and studied making it a qualitative study, as well. It showed that there is a pattern - a process - that takes time before disaffiliation occurs, until someone says, "Enough, I'm done." Most say they are done with Church but not with their faith. This can lead us to a feeling of despair as if our Church is doomed but, we need to look at what is happening in the lives of young people today. There is great hope because Catholic school teachers and catechists care deeply about the young and about the Church.

The qualitative data are data with stories or stories with a soul. It requires deep listening to young people. Doing so reveals the complexity of disaffiliation. We were told that there were 3 stories we were going to hear and we were asked to listen with sacred listening; not in a judgmental way. The first story was from a young woman named Lauren. Lauren has decided that God is everywhere in all nature so she now describes herself as a, "spiritual Catholic with post-modern identity." She stated that since we cannot know the ultimate truth, there is no point in discussing which religion is right or wrong. She identifies most with Catholic Social Teachings. She feels all should support the LGBTQ community and that we all experience God differently. There is no absolute right way. She wants the Church to have women deacons and priests and feels the Church makes it very difficult for young women to stay in the Church. Growing up Catholic, she always felt on the outskirts because of her sexual orientation that she states that God gave her. An analysis of her story reveals that she is very articulate and thoughtful. Most young people deeply care about the religious longings in their life.

So why do they leave? It is not about the Catholic Church. This disaffiliation is happening in all faith traditions. A PEW study in 2014 revealed that in 2007, 36.6 million young adults indicated that they had no religious affiliation. In 2014, this number was 55.8 million. 23% of the US population declares no religious affiliation.

However, this trend is not new in the modern world. It has been happening for the last 500 years - but imperceptibly. A Gallup poll shows that the rate of disaffiliation has increased dramatically since 1993. In 1993, the rate of disaffiliation was 8% while in 2014, it was 23%.

Actually, in our present day, disaffiliation is not a youth issue but their parents were the first generation with a significant percentage of non-affiliation rates.

Many pastors used to think that leaving the Church was a temporary thing; that it is something kids do and then return when they want to marry or have children, when they mature. But the reality is that this is not happening. One only needs to look at the numbers of baptisms, weddings, and funerals in a parish to see this. The trend will continue generationally in the US though we are lagging behind Europe and Australia by about 15 years.

Statistics show that there is no difference in disaffiliation between males and females; it is about 50/50. The most predominant to leave are non-Hispanic whites with a rate of 44% followed by the Hispanic or Latino population with a rate of 36%. With immigration increasing in the latter group, this number is going up for them and they are expected to catch up to the disaffiliation rate of whites shortly.

Disaffiliation also increases with an increase in wealth and with higher education.

Disaffiliation also happens most to those who have been very active in the Church.

The median age of disaffiliation is 13 years old.

AGE	Rate of Disaffiliation
10-12	24%
13-17	39%
18-20	11%
21-25	3%

Those less than 10 disaffiliated due to parental change (divorce or parents changed religion or stopped practicing). But from 13-17, the youth have made a conscious thoughtful decision to leave on their own.

Where do they go?

None (no affiliation)	35%
Christian non-Protestant	29%
Protestant	9%
Non-Christian	13%
Atheist/agnostic	14%

The vast majority do not leave because they no longer believe in God but what they mean by God is shifting.

Reasons given why they left:

Disagree with the teachings of the Church	38.9%
No need for religion -myths	16.7%
Changed denomination	16.1%
Family changed	16.1%
Don't believe in God	9.4%
Moral failures in the Church	7.8%
No freedom to question	7.8%
Other	6.7%
Just drifted away	2.8%
Not welcoming	1.1%

However, the interviews show that it is not that simple. The real reasons are many and complex per person. Since they are different and multiple for each person, there is no easy canned solution.

Story 2 was from Beatrice. Her family came from Mexico when she was young. They had been Catholic in Mexico and her grandmother was very devout. Her mother was not so devout. When they came to America, her uncle founded his own Christian church where he was the pastor. She went to both the Catholic church and to her uncle's church. When she was 10, she felt it was insane to ask a child of 10 to

confess sins to a stranger. Then, she just started believing in God on her own. She felt that organized religion separates rather than unites. She believes now in a higher power that is in everyone and everything and that the Church has mis-interpreted the Bible, perhaps because of so many translations. She questions why gay marriage is wrong if two people love each other and it hurts no one. She feels the Church makes her unhappy. She feels it makes you a better person to listen to the higher power in yourself. When you leave church after confession, you leave feeling judged. Now, she is happier. A review of her story shows that as a 10-year old, she encountered unreconciled discrepancies. She left church feeling judged. After the statisticians reviewed her tape, they uncovered 44 discrete things she said that answered why she left the Church. Every person who leaves has complex and multiple reasons for leaving. There is never any one thing that drives them away. Most just drift away very slowly over time with one reason after another mounting up until there is one final one that pushes them to make the break.

Are we paying attention? Disaffiliation is a process that can start when young and happens over time. Like the breakdown of a relationship between couples, it happens over time. There was no one there to help her reconcile her issues. An accumulation of unresolved questions and issues, left unaccompanied, builds up and then there is one last thing, the proverbial final straw.

We need to be present and see the issues, to be attentive to each individual.

There is, however, something even more important, something bigger at play, driving disaffiliation in the US: Secularization theory and religious identity. Secularization is not a loss in belief in God but the shifting role of the place of religion in culture.

In our culture, trust in institutions across the board has dropped:

Institution	1970's	Now	Alternate
Big Business	26%	18%	Local markets
Medical System	80%	39%	Homeopaths
Presidency	52%	36%	Local government
TV News	46%	21%	Niche news

Fewer Catholics recognize the relevance of the sacraments or understand the Eucharist or Mass.

The culture is fundamentally shifting. Religious identity that was centered in organized religion has shifted to being centered in personal choice and is personally constructed piecemeal from amalgams of religions.

The third interview was of Rachel. She was ultra-Catholic growing up. When she got to college, she did not know how to relate to non-Catholics. She began to question everything. She lost her faith and questioned her belief in God. Now, she identifies as "Catholic-adjacent." She loves Catholic Social Teaching and Social Justice but believes that women should be ordained. She doesn't want a church that divides. She thinks that rather than dictating what you should be before you come to church, that people should go to church and be transformed. She went from being ultra-Catholic to "Catholic-ish", to "Catholic-adjacent." There is a fluidity to religious identity here. They gradually move away.

The Church is no longer the center of identity.

Though youth walk away from religion, they seek and construct their own religions communities.

Examples include:

The Dinner Party where women who have suffered loss get together over dinner and wine once a month and talk about it to each other. It is cathartic. They have reconstructed the Early Church.

Another example is Crossfit, a training organization. The founder of Crossfit describes it as a quasi-religious experience that is all about being neighborhood based and giving a sense of belonging. In

training coaches, he tells them that they are not in a fitness business but in the belonging business. They are trained to know how to connect to the deepest parts of clients. He tells them that if they come to know the client that way, the client will never leave. He concludes that people may go to get fit a bit, but they go more to belong. Yoga and Meditation Centers work on the same premise. The orthodox established church pyramid is believe, behave, belong but this no longer holds people in community. Just the opposite does. Belonging is the foundational point of identity for the young.

What Can We Do?

The answer is found in cows!!! The question was raised in a study in England as to why some cows produced more milk than others, everything else being equal (breed, age, size, etc.). Were they being fed an organic diet? Were they being given special food? Was it naming and calling them by name? Surprisingly, it was the last, naming and calling the cow by name.

Our deepest human longing is that we yearn for a place to be known, nurtured, welcomed, free from judgment of fear of rejection, free to express ourselves, and a place where we would be missed if we were not there. To be known by name and missed if gone. People don't leave if they believe they are known.

The Catholic School System in the US may well be the last touch point for Catholic youth. Parish life is fading but Catholic schools establish a sense of belonging.

Build a community where the youth are known, and their problems and sorrows are acknowledged.

The Constitution on the Church in the Modern Age opening paragraph speaks to this. Today, the call made in *Lumen Gentium* is being carried out by Crossfit!

Understand that we need to get back to this. A sense of belonging will impact a young person's life, letting them know they are loved and by this, teaching them to love others.

God entrusts the young to our care. The greatest gift is a Catholic education grounded in truths, care, belonging.

This ended Maribeth's participation as she had to leave the next day, the last half-day of the Convention, to go to Idaho for their state CCW Convention. Andrea manned our NCCW booth through to the end and reported a great deal of traffic. We received new memberships. This experience was well worth the time and money involved for the exposure our NCCW received to 9,000 attendees, mostly women teachers, was invaluable.

-Maribeth Stewart Blogoslawski